

WHO CARES?

List of characters:

Martha	in their sixties
Arthur	
Joy	in their thirties
Jack	
Patricia	in their forties
Peter	
Doris	in their fifties
Dennis	
Sue	in their twenties
Sam	
A policeman	
Rufus	

THE SET: The stage is divided into four sections, each of which contains a table and two chairs placed sufficiently far upstage to allow a large playing area downstage. Sections two, three and four each have their own entrance upstage, and there are also entrances downstage right and left.

The first performance of WHO CARES? was on 19 March 1995 at The King's Head Theatre, Islington with the following cast:

Martha	Rachel Herbert
Arthur	David Forest
Joy	Chris Chamberlaine
Jack	Mark Cook
Patricia	Shuna Snow
Peter	Kit Hillier
Doris	Davilia David
Dennis	David McEwan
Sue	Fay Rusling
Sam	Mace Richards
A policeman	Mark Kempner
Rufus	Timothy Weekes
Director	Catherine Bird
Designer	Jo Jardine
Lighting	Nick Lacey
Sound	Laura Miles
Costumes	Carol Paul

All enquiries to elaine@hopecorner.net

ACT ONE

Section One: Arthur is seated at the table, writing, and Martha is knitting.

MARTHA: What are you doing, Arthur, my wonderful husband?

ARTHUR: I'm writing out cheques, Martha, my childhood sweetheart, whom I wed forty-five years ago and whom I love just as deeply now as I did then.

MARTHA: Cheques, my beloved? To whom are you making the cheques out?

ARTHUR: Why, to our favourite charities, dearest. This is Yuletide, and at such times our thoughts turn to those who are poorly off and in need of a helping hand.

MARTHA: It's true. Poorly off though we are ourselves, we must spare what we have for those worse off than ourselves. Those who are parched in the desert.

ARTHUR: Starving in the bush.

MARTHA: Victims of floods.

ARTHUR: Earthquakes.

MARTHA: War.

ARTHUR: Peace.

MARTHA: Disease.

ARTHUR: Alcohol.

MARTHA: Drugs.

ARTHUR: And indeed all disasters both natural and man-made.

MARTHA: Give them all we can afford, Arthur.

ARTHUR: Nay, and more besides.

MARTHA: Yes, give them more than we can afford. We can afford it.

ARTHUR: I wish I was hugely, massively and enormously rich, so that I could give more.

MARTHA: Then you could give a huge, massive and enormous amount.

ARTHUR: Thereby relieving more suffering. Martha, in spite of our perfect marriage and the complete harmony and contentment that has been the hallmark of our lives together for forty-five years not including the many years when we were childhood sweethearts, I must confess to one continual niggler of disappointment running like a dark thread through the otherwise silken sheen.

MARTHA: A dark thread, my beloved? I'm full of misgivings. Tell me quickly, Arthur, what it is.

ARTHUR: That we are not hugely, massively and enormously rich and thereby able to give more to the poor and needy.

MARTHA: Yes. Yes, that is a dark thread. But we haven't got the wherewithal to gain such riches. We are only little people, Arthur, and can do no more than our bit.

ARTHUR: You're right, Martha, and as always you are the voice of sound commonsense. And yet this tinge of regret remains.

MARTHA: That's because of your sensitive soul, and it's one of the reasons why I love you so much. And I share your regret.

ARTHUR: You, too, have a sensitive soul, Martha. And that is one of the reasons why I love you so much.

They continue to write and knit.

Section Two: Jack is reading a newspaper and smoking, Joy is ironing.

- JOY: Well I can't cope any more. It's getting on top of me.
He lays the newspaper aside.
- JACK: It's all the bloody government's fault.
- JOY: I don't know whose fault it is, but I can't go on coping with all the housework and the shopping and the cooking and two yobbo children and a layabout husband and my part-time job as a receptionist at the local hospital and give us a cigarette.
He does.
- JACK: We're behind in all our payments, you realize that, don't you?
- JACK: Are we?
- JOY: Are we? Are we? he says. We're behind with the mortgage, the car, the telly, the washing machine, the dishwasher, the gas, the electricity, the phone, our various department store accounts, the furniture, the carpets, the double glazing, the patio door, Darren's bicycle, Sharon's tricycle, last summer's holiday in the Algarve, and this morning...this morning, Jack, the dentist rang.
- JACK: The dentist?
- JOY: The dentist.
- JACK: What did the dentist want?
- JOY: He wanted to be paid for his work on my upper left molars.
- JACK: I thought you'd paid him.
- JOY: I did pay him. I paid him with a cheque. Which bounced. I can't take much more of it, Jack. It's humiliating. Especially when I see all the neighbours doing so well.
- JACK: Well, Joy, you're not the only one suffering. I mean, I'm not having an easy time. You think the executive chairman of the Emergency Workers' Union has an easy time? Torn between overworked underpaid workers, underworked overpaid managers, and a government that wants us all unpaid and out of work! I'm not having an easy time.
- JOY: I didn't say you were having an easy time.
- JACK: I'm not.
- JOY: What I'm saying is that if I don't have an easier time soon, then we shall run out of time because I'm not going on like this trying to keep our heads above water and that's another bill we haven't paid.
- JACK: What?
- JOY: Water. You're going to sing a different tune, Jack, when they cut off our water, not to mention the electricity, gas and phone.
- JACK: I've told you before, we're taking steps.
- JOY: Steps? Steps? You need to take a world record long jump, Jack, if we're going to make ends meet. And all this is coming to a head now because, with Christmas round the corner, Jack, I am going to need a considerable cash injection merely for the turkey, not to mention presents for Darren and Sharon, and I am not having them go to school and tell their friends that they had nothing for Christmas, especially knowing that all their friends will have had portable televisions and videos and computers .

JACK: We've put in a pay claim for twenty-three point four per cent.

JOY: Well, that's a start. When are you going to get it?

JACK: I don't know.

JOY: What?

JACK: We're negotiating.

JOY: We need it now, Jack, we need it now.

They continue to read and iron.

Section Three: Peter and Patricia are dining at table.

PATRICIA: How's the partridge, darling?

PETER: Hm? Oh, delicious, darling.

PATRICIA: You shot it yourself, darling.

PETER: Did I? Oh, jolly good.

PATRICIA: Darling.

PETER: What is it, darling?

PATRICIA: Kim and Daisy are coming home next week from their respective boarding schools.

PETER: Ah, you mean the private boarding schools to which we send them at a cost of ten thousand pounds per term to give them the best possible start in life. Are those the ones, darling?

PATRICIA: Exactly right, darling. How clever of you to remember.

PETER: With fees like those, who could forget, what, ha ha?

PATRICIA: Oh yes, ha ha, what? Kim's going skiing after Christmas with a party from the school. They're going to Switzerland.

PETER: That'll be another ten thousand, I suppose.

PATRICIA: (*with tinkling-bell laugh:*) Ha ha ha, no no, only two, darling. It's only for a couple of weeks.

PETER: Ah.

PATRICIA: Have another slice of partridge breast. Unfortunately, darling, it does give us a teeny-weeny problem.

PETER: Oh God, not another problem! Haven't I got enough problems, darling? All day long I have problems, problems, and more problems, and then to come home and have another problem...

PATRICIA: But it's only a teeny-weeny problem....

PETER: A problem, darling, is a problem, and what's teeny-weeny to you may be absolutely gigantic to me, and I really have enough on my plate, darling, with the government cutting my budget, and my decision to slash the staff, and the unions putting in their ludicrous pay claim, and now I come home to the bosom of my partridge to have yet another problem thrust down my thermals - I really don't think I can cope, darling, I can't, I really can't.

PATRICIA: You're so masterful, Peter.

PETER: Am I? Yes, I suppose I am.

PATRICIA: You'll cope with the cuts and you'll clobber the unions. You can cope with anything, Peter, and clobber anyone. No wonder your secretary adores you.

PETER: My secretary, darling?

PATRICIA: Miss Honeybreath.

PETER: Oh, that secretary. Now what's this about a problem, darling?

PATRICIA: It's Daisy.

PETER: Is Daisy a problem, darling?
 PATRICIA: Well, darling, only in so far as Kim's going skiing and so we must give Daisy something comparable.
 PETER: Ah. Well, let her go skiing as well, darling.
 PATRICIA: She doesn't want to go skiing.
 PETER: Well, what else is comparable to skiing?
 PATRICIA: Riding
 PETER: Riding?
 PATRICIA: What she'd really like is a horse.
 PETER: A horse.
 PATRICIA: A brown horse.
 PETER: A brown horse.
 PATRICIA: And riding lessons.
 PETER: A brown horse, and riding lessons. I suppose she wants to learn to ride on the brown horse.
 PATRICIA: That's exactly right, darling. You knew all the time!
 PETER: Well, no, but...
 PATRICIA: And I've seen just the horse! It's in the stud farm up at Hillhouse, which is owned by a patient of mine, the frightfully handsome Jeremy Corfe whose wife has just left him, and he said I could take darling Daisy up there and wait while one of his stable lads gives Daisy lessons on the brown horse. Now, do say yes, darling, or Daisy'll be so disappointed.
 PETER: Oh, all right, then.
 PATRICIA: Oh darling, how wonderful.
They continue to dine.

Section Four: Dennis and Doris have just finished watching TV.

DENNIS: The swine, the bastard, the snake-in-the-grass, he cut my best bit! No wonder I'm losing ground in the polls when the bloody media keep betraying me. We've got to do something about the media!
 DORIS: But it was no worse than your usual interviews, Dennis.
 DENNIS: The bit he cut was where I promised the country that all our problems would be solved within the next four years. I spelled out how we'd have ended unemployment, eliminated poverty and crime, solved the housing and transport problems, and restored efficiency to health and education. I dealt with all the issues in just that one section, and the bastard cut it out.
 DORIS: Maybe he knew you couldn't do it.
 DENNIS: But they were specific promises, Doris. People would have believed me.
 DORIS: People don't always believe politicians, Dennis.
 DENNIS: They'd believe me, Doris. Believe me, they'd believe me. I've got this convincing way of talking, as if I really mean it. That's what got me elected in the first place. But with the media criticizing me, and cutting the ground from under my feet, and telling lies and calling my bluffs and ridiculing my policies and bloody editing my interviews, I'm beginning to lose credibility. And the opposition don't help, always attacking me. I was twenty points behind in the last poll.
 DORIS: Well, if the worst comes to the worst, Dennis, you can always get a post in business, or at an American university.

DENNIS: I don't want a post in business or at an American university. I want power. I love power. I love making decisions that will affect people's lives. It makes me feel good, Doris. It makes me feel important. And I like seeing myself in the newspapers and on the telly when they say nice things about me, or say how important I am, or show me doing important things. I even like being interviewed when I come out of it best.

DORIS: It doesn't happen very often, Dennis.

DENNIS: No, that's what I'm complaining about. If things go on like this, Doris, I shan't be popular any more.

DORIS: You're not popular now, Dennis.

DENNIS: Oh, I am. People still love me. The ordinary people. The ordinary man-in-the-street still loves me. Doesn't he? He does, doesn't he, Doris? I mean, they all regard me as one of them. Don't they, Doris?

DORIS: I don't think ordinary people like politicians, Dennis.

DENNIS: Oh they do, they do. Well, they like me, Doris. I've heard the cheers. I mean, at the party conference I had a standing ovation.

DORIS: Well, you would at the party conference, wouldn't you?

DENNIS: Yes, but it came from the heart. And those are the people who count. Your own. People who see eye to eye with you. I don't expect the opposition to like me. You can't be in politics and be liked by everybody.

DORIS: But you're hated, Dennis.

DENNIS: Hated?

DORIS: Yes, people hate you. They say you've ruined the country.

DENNIS: That's nonsense. I've saved the country. I'm like a father to the country. I've done wonderful things for this country.

DORIS: What sort of things?

DENNIS: I've governed it. And it's still here. And people are prosperous - those that are prospering - and happy and healthy, apart from just a few...million, and that's their own fault, not mine. Politicians can't do everything. And we're all right. And my friends are all right. My friends still like me.

DORIS: So why were you twenty points behind in the last poll?

DENNIS: I'm misunderstood, that's why. We haven't been getting our message across.

DORIS: What is your message, Dennis?

DENNIS: That we are the best party, and I'm the best man to govern this country. All I need, Doris, is some sort of national crisis - not of my own making - which I can solve and will make me the hero again. If only some tin-pot little country would declare war on us, and I could go in and pulverise them.

They continue to drink.

Sue and Sam enter downstage left, Sam carrying a portable TV camera.

SUE: We need a good disaster, Sam.

SAM: Plane crash.

SUE: Train crash.

SAM: Earthquake.

SUE: Hurricane.

SAM: Flood.

SUE: Drought.

SAM: If only someone would assassinate the Prime Minister.

SUE: Or blow up a nuclear power station.

SAM: That might be dangerous.
 SUE: In America, then.
 SAM: Better if someone assassinated the Prime Minister.
 SUE: Well, someone's got to do something soon, or we shan't have a story.
 SAM: Why don't we make something up, Sue?
 SUE: We always make things up.
 SAM: No, I mean right from scratch. A fictitious disaster.
 SUE: Because we'd get found out, Sam. The beauty of our job is that nobody knows how much is fact and how much is fiction. If we make it all up, they'll never trust us again. Until they've forgotten what was said and who said it - which would take at least a week.
 SAM: Well we could get some yobbos to riot.
 SUE: What's new?
 SAM: True. A scandal would be nice — that always sells.
 SUE: Watergate.
 SAM: Irangate.
 SUE: Dianagate.
 SAM: Royal break-up.
 SUE: Royal breakdown.
 SAM: Fornication.
 SUE: Separation.
 SAM: Abdication.
 SUE: It's all old hat.
 SAM: Yesterday's news.
 SUE: Nobody's doing anything now.
 SAM: Or if they are, they're keeping quiet about it.
 SUE: Why are people so dirty?
 SAM: People are animals.
 SUE: Animals don't have newspapers.
 SAM: That's the difference. We're the only animals that can read about ourselves.
 SUE: Murder.
 SAM: Rape.
 SUE: Incest.
 SAM: Child abuse.
 SUE: The stuff of life. And none of it happening today.
 SAM: Let's go and see old Dennis. He's always good for a laugh.
He starts gathering up his things.

Section Four: Dennis and Doris still drinking.

DENNIS: I've had an idea.
 DORIS: Dennis, you're full of surprises.
 DENNIS: I'm going to go and see some ordinary people.
 DORIS: What do you mean by "ordinary people"?
 DENNIS: The man in the street, Doris. The average voter.
 DORIS: But you don't know any.
 DENNIS: I shall find some. And I shall ask them what they want me to do.
 DORIS: Resign, I should think.
 DENNIS: I need to know what ordinary people are thinking. What it is that would make them love me. And vote for me again.

DORIS: I thought they already loved you, Dennis.

DENNIS: More. Love me more.

Sue and Sam enter Section Four.

SUE: Hello, Dennis.

DENNIS: Aaaaargh! The media! No, ugh, yuck, go away, you horrible creatures, go away!

SUE: We've only come to see if you've got a quote for us.

DENNIS: But you never report what I say! You make it all up!

SUE: So do you.

DENNIS: No I don't!

SUE: Yes you do.

DENNIS: No I don't!

SUE: What about the figures for unemployment?

SAM: Spending on health.

SUE: Education.

SAM: Social welfare.

SUE: Pensions.

SAM: Housing.

SUE: They're all made up.

SAM: They're all lies.

DENNIS: They're not made up! They're not lies! They're official government statistics.

SUE: Give us a quote!

DENNIS: No I won't!

SUE: Tell us what you plan to do for people living below the poverty line.

DENNIS: No.

SUE (*writing*): I see. Prime Minister has no plans to help the poor.

DENNIS: I never said that.

SUE: Ah, so you do have plans.

DENNIS: What plans?

SUE: To help the poor.

DENNIS: Of course I have plans to help the poor. I have plans for everything.

SUE: So how are you going to deal with poverty?

DENNIS: I intend to eliminate poverty.

SUE: How?

DENNIS: By removing it.

SUE: But precisely how?

Dennis pulls a few faces, but remains silent.

Prime Minister at a loss for words on question of dealing with poverty.

DENNIS: Nonsense, I am never at a loss for words. On the question of poverty, I have always made government policy abundantly clear. We are against poverty. In all its forms. And we are ceaselessly working night and day to raise the standard of living of the poor so that they can rise above the poverty line and no longer be classified as poor, and to that end we have redefined the parameters of poverty with such a measure of success that the percentage of those living below the poverty line has during the time that we have been in office dwindled by the astonishing figure of no less than twenty~three point four per cent. A triumph for government policy.

SUE: And statistics. Are you therefore saying....

DENNIS: Now my dear young lady, you've had your statement, and I'm an extremely busy,

not to say extremely important man, and I must ask you to leave so that I can return to the mighty task of ruining...running the nation.

DORIS: Dennis.

DENNIS: What is it now? Um...yes, dearest?

DORIS: If you're going to be visiting ordinary people, might it not be an idea to have media coverage?

DENNIS: Media coverage?

DORIS: Let the world see how the Prime Minister of England mixes with his subjects. A man of the people, dear?

DENNIS: Ah! I see what you mean. Media coverage...yes. *(To Sue and Sam:)* Now then, my friends, let me stop all this silly teasing, ha ha. Joking aside, I'm glad you're here today. I've always enjoyed splendid relations with the Press - fine body of men...and women...and I like to cooperate. And if I may say so, you're very good at your job, very good indeed. I like your approach. And I know I can trust you. How would you like a really juicy story? With pictures.

SUE: Tell us more, Dennis.

DENNIS *(smiling painfully:)* Very well...Sue. I'm going to meet some ordinary people. Isn't that...how do you say?...fab?

SUE: You're going to meet some ordinary people.

DENNIS: Yes! The plebs. I'm going to mix. And I'm inviting you along to cover the story.

SAM: What story?

DENNIS: My meeting ordinary people. You can take your photographs and you can record what I say. It should be quite an event. If I could suggest a headline to you:
Prime Minister Meets The People.

SUE: What's the purpose of this meeting, Dennis?

DENNIS: Well...um...Sue, I'm returning as it were to my roots. I wish you wouldn't call me Dennis. I'm Prime Minister, for Heaven's sake, so you should call me Prime Minister.

SUE: Sorry, Prime Minister. You were talking about your roots.

DENNIS: Yes, well, I come from people...

SUE: Really?

DENNIS: Yes, oh yes, I have a very ordinary background.

SUE: I thought your father was a multimillionaire.

DENNIS: Well, yes, he was, but he was a very ordinary multimillionaire. I mean, he was only a grocer. He just happened to own a few hundred grocery shops.

SUE: It's not a gimmick, is it?

DENNIS *(innocently:)* A gimmick?

SUE: Just for a bit of publicity.

DENNIS: Now Sue, what would I need publicity for?

SUE: To make up a few points in the opinion polls, and I wish you wouldn't call me Sue. I'm Miss Allbright, for Heaven's sake.

DENNIS: Of course, Miss Allbright. I was only trying to be friendly

He pats her hesitantly on the shoulder.

SUE: Well don't try and get too friendly.

He removes his hand, and smiles sheepishly at Doris.

Will Mrs Prime Minister be present at this historic occasion?

DORIS: No, I prefer to keep in the background when Dennis is making a fool of himself.

SUE: May I quote you on that?

DORIS: Not until after the next election.
 SUE: Lead on, then, Prime Minister, we're right behind you.
 DENNIS: I'd prefer to have you in front of me, where I can see you.
 SUE: But we don't know where we're going.
 DENNIS: Nor do I.
 SUE: Spoken like a true Prime Minister.
 SAM: I know where some ordinary people live.
 DENNIS: Good, then you lead the way.
 DORIS: Enjoy yourself, dear.
They all go off left.

Section Two: Joy helps Jack put on his tie.

JOY: Don't you let him talk you into anything. You've been fobbed off long enough, and we've reached the end of the line. It's now or never, Jack.
 JACK: All right, all right!
 JOY: You want it in full. And back-dated.
 JACK: I know.
 JOY: With a Christmas bonus thrown in. Get yourself psyched up, Jack.
 JACK: I am psyched up.
 JOY: No you're not. You're not even agitated.
 JACK: I am agitated. I'm agitated inside.
 JOY: You should be agitated outside. You should be swearing blue murder now.
 JACK: Bloody hell!
 JOY: That's more like it. Let's have some aggression, Jack.
 JACK: I'll bloody belt you.
 JOY: Not me. Him. Come on, work yourself up. Government... management...
 JACK: Government, management, wages policy, anti-union laws, scabs, blacklegs...
 JOY: Work.
 JACK: Work, bloody work, low wages, long hours....
 JOY: Eroded differentials.
 JACK: I know, I know. Eroded differentials, bad working conditions, unsocial hours, low standard of living, my members won't stand for it...
 JOY: Brain drain.
 JACK: Well, I don't know about that...
 JOY: Come on, Jack, come on. Let's have some fire in the belly.
 JACK: Just let me get my hands on 'em! Grrrrrr!
 JOY: Go on.
 JACK: Bloody Sir Peter and his pansy poofs, I'll give them a bloody roasting!
 JOY: That's better. Well, you look the part in your executive suit and your executive collar and tie, and here's your executive brief case. And if you don't get the full amount back-dated along with Christmas bonus, don't you come crawling back here tonight unless you want a back-dated rolling pin over your executive bald patch.

They go off upstage.

Section Three: Patricia helps Peter on with his tie.

PATRICIA: Don't let these foul-mouthed yobbos talk you into anything, darling.
 PETER: No fear, darling. I can run rings round these chappies.
 PATRICIA: That's the spirit, darling.

PETER: Oh God, I hope I don't get a migraine.

PATRICIA: You haven't got one coming on, have you?

PETER: No, not at the moment.

PATRICIA: I hope not, darling, because I can't possibly stay with you, because I promised darling Daisy to take her up to Hillhouse again, because she's going to have another lesson on Rajah while I wait in the house with Jeremy.

PETER: No, I'll be all right.

PATRICIA: You do look frightfully masterful, Peter.

PETER: Do I? I wonder what these damn union chaps are going say when I tell 'em about the pay freeze and the staff cuts.

PATRICIA: Don't take any notice of what they say, Peter.

PETER: No, I shan't.

PATRICIA: That's the spirit.

PETER: But what am I going to do if they threaten to strike?

PATRICIA: Sack the bounders, darling.

PETER: I've got to sack them anyway, but I can't sack them all.

PATRICIA: Then tell them you'll sack half of them, and don't say which half.

PETER: It's not quite so simple. If they strike, there's going to be a frightful kerfuffle.

PATRICIA: What sort of kerfuffle?

PETER: Well I shall be very unpopular.

PATRICIA: It won't be your fault if they strike, darling.

PETER: Then whose fault will it be?

PATRICIA: Theirs, of course. The country can't afford to pay them, darling, and they're all layabouts anyway. It's a matter of cost efficiency.

PETER: Ah yes, cost efficiency.

PATRICIA: Improving the service.

PETER: Ah yes, improving the service.

PATRICIA: Reallocation of resources.

PETER: Ah yes, reallocation of resources.

PATRICIA: That's the spirit, darling. And remember what that government minister said.

PETER: What was that, darling?

PATRICIA: If you fail, you'll be out of a job.

PETER: Oh God! Here comes the migraine.

PATRICIA: Off you go, darling. Good luck. Come along, Daisy! Time to go to Hillhouse!
They go off upstage.

Section One: Arthur still writing, Martha still knitting.

MARTHA: What are you doing now, Arthur, my hard-working and conscientious husband?

ARTHUR: I'm writing out Christmas cards, Martha, my hard-working and adorable wife. I'm writing Christmas cards to our three loving children, our nine loving grandchildren, and all our many, many friends both in this country and abroad. After all, Martha, Christmas is a time when one's thoughts do turn to one's loved ones, wherever they may be.

MARTHA: How true that is, my dearest. Although one's thoughts are always with one's loved ones, at Yuletide they're even more so.

ARTHUR: I only wish that I was hugely, massively and enormously rich so that I could shower our loved ones with the gifts they all deserve, but already I've given all our money to the charities I mentioned to you earlier.

MARTHA: It was the right thing to do, Arthur. We must think of the needy before we

think of ourselves or indeed of our loved ones. Oh dear!

ARTHUR: What is it, my sweetheart?

MARTHA: I have been struck by a thought. If you have given all our money to charity, how will you be able to post the Christmas cards to our loved ones?

ARTHUR: (*laughing:*) Oh dear, Martha, what a storm in a teacup! I took the precaution of purchasing all the postage stamps when I purchased the cards. That way there was no danger of my giving to charity the money that was needed to post our Christmas cards!

MARTHA: Oh Arthur, I should have known that with your thoughtfulness and foresight you would have made all the necessary arrangements.

ARTHUR: A stitch in time, Martha.

MARTHA: Saves nine grandchildren from being cardless.

They both laugh. There is a knock off right.

Oh, now who could that be?

ARTHUR: Well, whoever it is, we must let them in, Martha. Friend or stranger, all are welcome in our little nest.

He gets up, and lets in Dennis, followed by Sue and Sam.

DENNIS: Hello.

ARTHUR: Hello.

DENNIS: Erm...ha...

ARTHUR: Can I do anything for you?

DENNIS: Ah, you...er...you don't recognize me, then?

ARTHUR: Well...no, not really.

DENNIS: I'm the Prime Minister.

ARTHUR: Oh yes, so you are! I thought I had seen you before, but I couldn't quite place you. Yes, you are the Prime Minister.

MARTHA: Who is it, dear?

ARTHUR: It's the Prime Minister, my precious.

MARTHA: Oh!

DENNIS: I thought I'd just come and talk to you ordinary people, to show that in spite of my immense importance as an internationally renowned politician and statesman I am able to come and talk to ordinary people.

Martha is busily tidying herself and the room.

MARTHA: Hadn't you better invite him in, Arthur?

ARTHUR: Oh yes, of course, won't you come into our little nest?

DENNIS: That's very kind of you. These are my...um...friends, who are recording this historic occasion.

They now enter.

Hello, I'm the Prime Minister.

MARTHA: Hello.

ARTHUR: This is my beloved wife Martha.

MARTHA: Pleased to meet you.

DENNIS: And honoured, I'm sure.

MARTHA: Well, thank you.

DENNIS: No, I mean, you're honoured.

MARTHA: Oh! Can I get you a cup of tea, Mr um...

DENNIS: Just call me Prime Minister. A cup of tea would be...ah...but I'm not sure if we can trust the water in this area and besides I wonder how clean your cups are. No, thank you. I've just come to have a talk to you ordinary people.

MARTHA: Well, that's nice.

DENNIS: Although I'm an extraordinary man, I'm really ordinary myself underneath my extraordinariness.

ARTHUR: Yes, you do look very ordinary, I must say.

DENNIS: Do I?

ARTHUR: Well, you're a lot smaller than I'd imagined you to be.

DENNIS: Smaller?

ARTHUR: But I suppose you're always standing on platforms and things, aren't you?

DENNIS: I'm not small. I'm a very imposing figure.

MARTHA: Would you like to sit down, Mr Prime Minister?

DENNIS (*looking at the chair:*) I don't know, that chair looks a bit sat in to me. You can catch things from chairs. No, I'd better not.

Awkward pause.

Yes, well...it's very nice meeting you.

ARTHUR: It's nice meeting you. Isn't it, Martha?

MARTHA: Yes. We don't meet many people.

DENNIS: Especially Prime Ministers, eh? Ha ha!

No response to his joke.

(*To Sue:*) What does one say to ordinary people?

SUE: Why don't you ask them their opinion of your government?

DENNIS: Well I'm not interested in their opinion.

SAM: Ask them their opinion of you as Prime Minister.

DENNIS (*clearing his throat:*) I'm the Prime Minister, as you know, and an immensely important, internationally renowned politician and statesman. Many people think I'm the finest Prime Minister this country's ever had. Under my leadership the country has prospered as never before, the economy is strong, health and education know that they're in safe hands, our defence is impregnable, industry is thriving, and people generally are happy and content. Don't you agree?

ARTHUR: Well I just wish you'd do more to help the poor.

DENNIS: We are doing everything that can possibly be done to help the poor, and no government has ever done more than we have to eliminate poverty. Strangely enough, I was discussing this only recently with someone or the other, and it was pointed out that since I have been in office, the number of those living below the poverty line has dwindled by the astonishing figure of no less than thirty-four point six per cent. A triumph for government policy.

SUE: It was twenty-three point four per cent half an hour ago.

DENNIS: These are the up-dated figures.

ARTHUR: I don't just mean in this country, though. I'm also thinking of those poor unfortunate souls that are starving elsewhere in the world, and to whom my wife and I feel obliged to donate our last pennies in order to try to alleviate their suffering.

DENNIS: Elsewhere in the world?

SUE: He means countries other than Britain, Prime Minister.

DENNIS: Yes, yes, I know what he means, and as a matter of fact my government's overseas development aid — that's the technical term for it — has increased by fifty-seven point three per cent since I've been in office, but of course the problem with them is that not one single one of them has a vote in our

elections.

ARTHUR: Well, we just feel...

DENNIS: It doesn't matter what you feel. You're just a tiny cog in a giant wheel. I'm the one who counts. Well, it's been a pleasure talking to you, but I'm an immensely busy man and I can't waste any more of my valuable time on you. *(To Sue:)* I hope you're getting all this down.

SUE: Oh yes.

DENNIS: *(To Sam:)* I forgot to mention, I prefer to have the left profile. The right side of my nose is just ever so slightly crooked, not that anyone would really notice. *(To Sue:)* I thought I did pretty well, eh? Kept the conversation flowing.

SUE: We're still here, Prime Minister.

DENNIS: What?

SUE: We haven't said goodbye yet.

DENNIS: Ah, goodbye.

MARTHA: Goodbye.

ARTHUR: Well, goodbye.

DENNIS: I shan't shake hands with you - one never knows where ordinary people might have been.

ARTHUR: This way, then.

DENNIS *(as they go out:)* In fact, I quite enjoyed it. Let's see if we can find some more ordinary people

They go. Arthur comes back.

MARTHA: Fancy the Prime Minister coming to see us!

ARTHUR: We're very lucky people, Martha, to be living in a country where such things can happen.

They resume writing and knitting.

Jack and Peter enter severally upstage into their respective sections, and confront each other downstage.

PETER: I think this meeting should take place in my office. It's more comfortable, and I'm used to it, and I shall feel at home there and you won't.

JACK: No.

PETER: What?

JACK: No.

PETER: Am I to take that as a refusal?

JACK: Yes.

PETER: Then where do you want the meeting to take place?

JACK: In my office.

PETER: Your office is absolutely filthy and smelly and vile. Like you.

JACK: My members will want this meeting to take place in my office.

PETER: The board expect these meetings to take place in my office.

JACK: Right, that's it.

PETER: Where are you going?

JACK: The meeting's off.

PETER: Oh come now, come now, let's be reasonable. Surely we can find a compromise. Why don't we meet, for example, in a neutral office? Where neither of us feels at home.

JACK: What's the catch?

PETER: No catch. Scout's honour.

JACK: I'm staying here.

PETER: And I'll stay here.
Watching each other warily all the time, they each fetch a chair and sit downstage in their respective sections.

JACK: There, that wasn't so difficult, was it, you stupid, aggressive trade union nitwit?

JACK: All right, you pompous upper-class twitbit, let's get on with it.

PETER (*ingratiating:*) Now then, Jack, we've known each other a long time, and we needn't beat about the bush, need we? This pay claim of yours - twenty-three point four per cent - you know as well as I do that it's way, way, way over the top.

JACK: It's justified.

PETER: In this time of economic stringency, falling profit margins, universal cutbacks, underinvestment, reduced demand, government incompetence, public disenchantment, and the threat of my personal unemployment if I give way to your absurd demand I must inform you...

JACK: That is derisory.

PETER: What is?

JACK: Your offer.

PETER: I haven't offered you anything.

JACK: Then that is worse than derisory.

PETER: I'm going to come straight to the point, Jack. We all have to tighten our belts, roll up our sleeves, cut our coat according to our cloth...

JACK: How much?

PETER: Nothing, and we're cutting staff by forty-six point eight per cent.

JACK: You what?

PETER: Believe me, Jack, it hurts me as much as it hurts you, but to be cost-effective we have to trim the fat, batten down the hatches, get leaner, fitter, blah blah, waffle, waffle, migraine...

JACK: We will not accept any staff cuts, and we insist on full payment of our justified claim, failing which I shall have no hesitation...

PETER: There's no money.

JACK: There's plenty of money.

PETER: Where?

JACK: The government's got it.

PETER: But they want to give it back to the people, Jack.

JACK: Right, then they can give it back to us.

PETER: No, no, Jack, you're not the people. You're riff-raff. It's to go to real people with taste and manners and high incomes.

JACK: Twenty-three point four per cent, or we shall begin productive resistance.

PETER: What's productive resistance?

JACK: A refusal to carry out the work for which we are inadequately staffed and paid.

PETER: You mean a strike?

JACK: I mean productive resistance.

PETER: Industrial action?

JACK: Such terms are now officially obsolete, owing to their negative associations in the public mind.

PETER: Jack, I urge you not to call a strike. You'll be risking lives, and there'll be a public outcry, and everybody'll blame me.

JACK: Then stuff the cuts and give us the money.

PETER: But the government have said no, Jack.

- JACK: Then tell the government to say yes. They say yes to weapons and domes and higher bloody M.P.s' salaries, so they can say yes to us.
- PETER: Now be reasonable, Jack. If they said yes to you, they'd have to say yes to all the other layabouts - the teachers, the nurses, the police - and if everybody got twenty-three point four per cent, where would that leave us?
- JACK: Twenty-three point four per cent better off. I've told you the alternative.
- PETER: You're a hard man, Jack. You drive a hard bargain. I can understand why your members elected you to represent them, because not many men could get me to do what I'm about to do, but you've done it, and all credit to you. Reluctantly, and with many misgivings because I'm putting my own head on the block, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to reduce the staff cuts to just forty per cent.
- JACK: Sod off.
- PETER: It's a fair...
- JACK: There's no point in this conversation continuing.
He gets up.
- PETER: Hold on, Jack, keep your temper! Just because you can't have the whole packet of wine gums, you don't have to throw the blackcurrant one away! Hm? Besides, the media are outside. We've got to stick around for at least six hours, or they'll say we haven't tried.
Jack sits down.
- JACK: You want a game of cards?
- PETER: Certainly not. I can't cheat as well as you. Staff cuts of thirty-three per cent. That's my final offer.
- JACK: No.
- PETER: Thirty per cent.
- JACK: No.
- PETER: Twenty-seven point five.
- JACK: No.
- PETER: All right, all right, I know when I'm beaten. Twenty-five. That is my absolutely final, maximum, unraisable offer.
- JACK: No.
- PETER: Oh God, the migraine! What do you want, Jack, for heaven's sake? Blood?
- JACK: No staff cuts, and a rise of twenty-three point four per cent.
- PETER: You can't have it! You know you can't have it! Aaaaaargh, God, I hate you!
- JACK: My members' demand is totally justified. Our standard of living has been slashed, our differentials have been eroded, and we've fallen behind in the league table of wages. If we're to catch up and resume our rightful position, we must have twenty-three point four per cent.
- PETER (*joining in:*) Twenty-three point four per cent. Well, you can't. Nobody ever gets that kind of rise.
- JACK: You did.
- PETER: Me?
- JACK: That was the precise figure that you had last year when you finished negotiating our wage freeze.
- PETER: Did I?
- JACK: Twenty-three point four per cent.
- PETER: Was it?
- JACK: Back-dated to the first of January.
- PETER: Well I never. How the hell did you find that out? Well, that may be so, I don't

recall precisely - I never pay much attention to figures - but in any case, let's get this clear, you can't possibly compare yourself to me. I'm highly educated, extremely civilized, exceptionally well-bred, and rich, whereas you're just an ignorant, lower-class guttersnipe. If I did get twenty-three point four per cent, then I thoroughly deserved it, and jolly good luck to me.

JACK: Well, I shall tell my members what you've said, and we shall take the appropriate action.

PETER: You can't.

JACK: We will.

PETER: How about a pay freeze and staff cuts of twenty-three point four per cent?

JACK: I'm not an unreasonable man, and I will make a concession, so that I can inform the media that I'm not an unreasonable man and am willing to make concessions. On behalf of my members I'll reduce our demand.

PETER: Thank God!

JACK: No cuts and a rise of twenty-three per cent.

Sue and Sam enter upstage, Section Two.

PETER (*clapping his hand to his forehead:*) Oh, give me paracetamol!

JACK: Take it or leave it.

PETER: Never! I refuse to give in!

JACK: Our productive resistance will begin tomorrow morning.

He makes to leave, but is confronted by Sue and Sam.

SUE: What's the news, then, Jack? Have you reached agreement?

JACK: Unfortunately, management are not prepared to grant our justified claim, and although we have offered a compromise, negotiations have broken down.

SUE: Does this mean strike action?

JACK: My members will be pursuing a policy of productive resistance from tomorrow morning.

SUE: Is there no hope of reopening negotiations?

JACK: We're always ready to negotiate, provided we're offered more money.

SUE: A strike would cause terrible hardship.

JACK: We greatly regret any inconvenience to the public, but the responsibility lies fairly and squarely with management.

SUE: Have you any plans for dealing with emergencies?

JACK: We shall ensure that the public will not be in any danger. Now, I have to report back to my members and I also wish to go and get pissed.

He goes off upstage. Sue and Sam cross to Section Three, where Peter sits head in hands.

SUE: Sir Peter, do have a statement for us?

PETER: What? Oh, it's you.

He whips out a mirror and straightens his hair.

SUE: We gather talks have broken down.

PETER: Well, no, we're always ready to talk. I'm afraid it's the union that's proved totally intransigent. I've put a fair offer on the table, and they've simply rejected it.

SUE: We understand the unions were asking for 23.4 per cent.

PETER: And that's exactly what I offered them.

SUE: What? Then why didn't they accept?

PETER: Sheer bloody-mindedness.

JACK (*from off*): He offered us 23.4 per cent staff cuts and a pay-freeze.

PETER: Well, that's just a verbal quibble.

SUE: What will you do if there's a strike?

PETER: I'll shoot myself. Or shoot the damn union chappie. I can't go on like this, I really can't. I mean, if it wasn't for the absolutely fabulous salary that I get paid, I'd have chucked this damn job in years ago. Why can't they just pay me and leave me alone?

He begins to leave upstage. Joy comes from upstage into section two, where she resumes ironing. At the same time Dennis enters downstage right.

SUE: Will you be able to keep an emergency service running?

PETER: It's no use asking me. I haven't got a clue.

He goes off.

DENNIS: I say, Sue!

SUE: Oh, it's you, Dennis.

DENNIS: I'm going to visit some more ordinary people. I thought you might like to cover it.

SUE: We were just going to get in our report on the strike that's been called for tomorrow.

DENNIS: A strike?

SUE: All the emergency services are coming out.

DENNIS: Are they? Well, surely you can spare a few minutes to cover me talking to some ordinary people. After all, I am the Prime Minister.

SUE: Is this the house you're going to?

DENNIS: That's right. Someone told me there's some avid government supporters living here.

SUE (*aside to Sam*): Someone with a sense of humour.

SAM: Should be worth recording.

SUE: Yes, all right, we'll cover it, but perhaps you could just give us a statement first about the strike.

DENNIS: The strike...yes, well, the government is very concerned about it, and we're keeping an extremely close watch on the situation.

SUE: You've no intention of intervening?

DENNIS: Oh no. No, no. Frankly, I wouldn't know what to do. Now, shall we get on with the really important business of the day, hm?

He "knocks". Joy looks up, and then comes downstage,

I'll bet these people'll recognize me.

JOY: Oh!

DENNIS: Hello.

DENNIS: I'm the Prime Minister.

JOY: I know you are. What do you want?

DENNIS: Well, I've just come to talk to you. I'm going round talking to people – ordinary people like you.

JOY: Well, I don't want to talk to you! I wouldn't be seen...

She sees Sue and Sam. Total change of manner:

Oh! You're Sue, aren't you?

SUE: That's right.

JOY: Are we on telly?
 SUE: You will be, yes.

JOY: Oh! Well, come in, then. This is a real honour. *(To Dennis:)* Not you.
Dennis comes in nevertheless, following Sue and Sam.
 Fancy you coming to see me. I'll just tidy myself up.
She does so, talking all the time.
 I've never actually been on telly before. I suppose you've come about the strike.

SUE: Well, we've really come to film you talking to the Prime Minister.

JOY: Who wants to talk to him?

DENNIS: Look...excuse me...
He pushes past Sue and plants himself in front of the camera.
 I'm the Prime Minister.

JOY: All right, I'll talk to you for a minute or two, though it's against all my principles. And what I have to say to you is this: the sooner you and your lot get out of it, the better.

DENNIS: No, no! *(Waving his arms about:)* Cut! Stop the film. *(To Joy:)* You're not supposed to say that.

JOY: I'll say what I bloody well like. This is my home, and who invited you anyway?

DENNIS: You're not a government supporter at all, are you?

JOY: Me, a government supporter?!

DENNIS: You're from the other side. I can tell. *(To Sue and Sam)* Now keep calm. There's no danger.
He is backing away.
 Don't make any sudden movements. Keep your eye firmly on the enemy, and when you're sure you're out of reach, run like hell!
He rushes off downstage left. Sue and Sam laugh.

JOY: I always knew it. We're being governed by a raving lunatic. Come and have a cup of tea, and then you can give me a proper interview.
They all go off upstage. This leaves Arthur and Martha as the only characters left on stage. Martha is still knitting.

ARTHUR: So there's going to be a strike.

MARTHA: Yes.

ARTHUR: What a terrible thing. It's fortunate that the government, led by our old friend the Prime Minister, will be keeping a close watch on the situation.

MARTHA: I felt sorry for the union leader. After all, he did say his claim was justified.

ARTHUR: And clearly he regretted the inconvenience to the public. Such a man probably lies awake at night worrying about the effect of the strike on ordinary people like us.

MARTHA: On the other hand, I also felt sorry for the leader of the employers.

ARTHUR: Yes, he said he'd made a fair offer.

MARTHA: And he said the country couldn't afford to pay more.

ARTHUR: But I hope he doesn't shoot himself. That wouldn't solve the problem.

MARTHA: I hope he doesn't shoot the union leader either. Because that wouldn't solve the problem.

ARTHUR: No, shooting people doesn't solve any problems. It might solve more problems if people stopped shooting each other.

MARTHA: I wish they would.

ARTHUR: If all the guns and the bullets and the bombs and the rockets were abolished,

Martha, and all the money was spent on food and clothing and shelter for the poor, there wouldn't be any poor.

MARTHA: And we'd have a much happier world.

ARTHUR: I would have liked to have said that to the Prime Minister, but there wasn't time.

MARTHA: Maybe he'll come and see us again one day. Oh!

ARTHUR: What is it, Martha?

MARTHA: Oh dear!

ARTHUR: What is it, my precious?

MARTHA: I had a sudden pain.

ARTHUR: A pain?

MARTHA: Yes, here in the chest. Ooooooh! Oooooooh, Arthur!

ARTHUR: I'm here.

MARTHA: I don't feel very well. Aaaaaah!

She collapses in the chair.

End of Act One

ACT TWO

Immediate continuation.

ARTHUR: Well, well, this is a pretty kettle of fish. I've never seen you looking so pecky, Martha.

MARTHA: I feel pecky, Arthur.

ARTHUR: If it's a pain in your chest, then it could be a bad attack of indigestion. I sometimes have a bit of a pain when I've eaten some baked beans, but it goes when I've let out a good whoopsie.

MARTHA: I haven't had any baked beans, Arthur. Oh dear!

ARTHUR: Well, it needn't be baked beans, dearest. Radishes have the same effect.

MARTHA: I think I'm having a heart attack, Arthur.

ARTHUR: Oh dear.

MARTHA: Get some help.

ARTHUR: Right. Thank heavens we live in a country where help is always at hand. Help! Help! Don't worry, Martha, help will soon be here. Help! Help!

MARTHA: Arthur.

ARTHUR: What is it, dearest?

MARTHA: They're on strike.

ARTHUR: That's true, but they said the public would not be in any danger, and so I think we can rely on them to come and help us. Help! Help! *(Pause.)* Help! Help!

MARTHA: Is anybody coming?

ARTHUR: Not at the moment.

MARTHA: Maybe you should shout a little louder, Arthur.

ARTHUR: Well, I don't want to disturb anybody. But on the other hand, if we're going to get help, I'd better disturb somebody. Help! Help help help! Help!

Jack enters Section Two from upstage.

JACK: What's all that bloody row?

ARTHUR: Help!

JACK: A bloke can't even sit for half an hour with his feet up smoking a fag and

watching the telly and having a quiet glass of beer and a good fart without somebody bloody shouting blue murder down his earhole.

ARTHUR: It's my wife.

JACK: It's not your bloody wife, it's you. I can tell the difference between a bloody man's voice and a bloody woman's voice, mate, and that was you.

ARTHUR: No, you don't understand. She's ill. I think she's having a heart attack.

JACK: The way you were shouting, it's a wonder I'm not having a bloody heart attack.

ARTHUR: But we need help.

JACK: I expect you do.

ARTHUR: Well, aren't you going to help us, then?

JACK: Not me, mate. I am at present extremely busy conducting a campaign of productive resistance.

ARTHUR: Oh. I'm sorry to have disturbed you, but I thought you were supposed to help us, because in this wonderful country of ours, help is always at hand.

JACK: In this wonderful country of ours, help is at hand for those with hands to help themselves.

ARTHUR: But I don't know what to do.

JACK: In my job, I've met a lot of people like you, who don't know what to do. And do you know what I tell them?

ARTHUR: No, what do you tell them?

JACK: I tell them they're ignorant. This country's full of ignorant people. They're so ignorant, they don't even know they're ignorant.

MARTHA: Arthur!

ARTHUR: Yes, sweetheart?

MARTHA: Is anyone coming?

ARTHUR: Not at the moment.

JACK: That your wife?

ARTHUR: Yes.

JACK: Nothing wrong with her. She's still talking. I mean, if she'd been an emergency, I might have been able to do something.

ARTHUR: She is an emergency.

JACK: No. An emergency's when you're dead.

Joy enters upstage.

JOY: What's going on, Jack?

JACK: Bloke here says his wife's having a heart attack.

ARTHUR: She's very ill.

JOY: All right, Jack, I'll handle this. You go back to your beer, fags and telly.

Jack goes off upstage.

Where is she?

ARTHUR: She's over here. Help has come, Martha. I knew the health service wouldn't let us down.

JOY: You the patient?

MARTHA: Yes.

Joy sits at the table, producing pen and paper.

JOY: Right. Name?

ARTHUR: Oh.

JOY: You can give me the details if you like.

ARTHUR: But I thought...

JOY: Name?

ARTHUR: Martha.
 JOY: Age?
 ARTHUR: Sixty-six.
 JOY: Sex?
 ARTHUR: Well, not very often.
 JOY: (*looking up:*) Female. Address?
 ARTHUR: Sixteen Sixteenth Street, South West Sixteen.
 JOY: Married or single
 ARTHUR: Married. Both of us.
 JOY: Husband's name?
 ARTHUR: Arthur, but...
 JOY: Husband's age?
 ARTHUR: Sixty-seven, but I thought you...
 JOY: Sexual diseases, either partner, including AIDS?
 ARTHUR: Pardon?
 JOY: Sexual diseases, either partner, including AIDS?
 ARTHUR: No!
 JOY: Not no. None. How are you paying, cash, cheque, or credit card?
 ARTHUR: But I thought it was free.
 JOY: Of course it's free. But if you want a free health service, you have to pay for it.
 Cash, cheque, or credit card?
 ARTHUR: Well, cheque then.
 JOY: Single or joint account?
 ARTHUR: It's a joint account. We always do things together, but I don't see why...
 JOY: Bank or building society?
 ARTHUR: Bank.
 JOY: Current or deposit?
 ARTHUR: It's a current...
 JOY: Has the account at any time in the last twenty-five years been overdrawn?
 ARTHUR: No, we...
 JOY: Has either of you in the last twenty-five years been convicted of debt, theft, fraud, embezzlement, or shop-lifting?
 ARTHUR: No!
 JOY: Is your house rented, owned by yourself, or government or council property?
 ARTHUR: Well, it's owned by the council...
 JOY: Oh! You could be in trouble.
 ARTHUR: Trouble?
 JOY: Never mind. Is your furniture paid for?
 ARTHUR: Yes.
 JOY: Do you own any items of value, such as paintings, jewellery etc.?
 ARTHUR: Well there's my wife's engagement ring, which was left to me by my grandmother and which contains some precious stones including a diamond.
 JOY: Value?
 ARTHUR: I don't know. A lot.
 JOY: "A lot". Sign here, and here.
 ARTHUR: What am I signing?
 JOY: Just the usual.
 ARTHUR: This says: "I promise not to sue the health service if anything goes wrong."
 JOY: If you want treatment, you have to sign it.

ARTHUR: I do want Martha to have treatment.
He signs.
 This says: "I promise to pay the health service whatever I'm told to pay."
 But supposing I can't pay?

JOY: Don't worry, they'll find ways to make you pay.
He signs.

ARTHUR: Can Martha have her treatment now?

JOY: We'll put her on the waiting list.

ARTHUR: But she's very ill.

JOY: I'll do what I can.

ARTHUR: Thank you.

JOY: But she'll have to wait her turn, like everyone else.
She is about to leave.

ARTHUR: Supposing she dies?

JOY: Then let us know and we'll cross her off the list.
She returns to section two, and goes off upstage.

MARTHA: Arthur!

ARTHUR: I'm here, dearest.

MARTHA: Is the lady going to help us?

ARTHUR: She said she'll do what she can.

MARTHA: What can she do?

ARTHUR: I think she can put you on the waiting list.

MARTHA: How long am I going to have to wait?

ARTHUR: Until it's your turn, I think she said.

MARTHA: And when will it be my turn?

ARTHUR: I suppose when other people have had their turn.

MARTHA: I don't think I can wait that long...aaaaaah!
She lapses into unconsciousness.

ARTHUR: Martha! Martha, my precious! Oh dear! Now what am I going to do?
He goes to the edge of the section and shouts:
 Help! Help!
Sue and Sam enter downstage left.
 Help! Help!

SUE: Was that a cry for help?

ARTHUR: Help! Help!

SAM: Yes.

SUE: A cry for help means someone in trouble, and someone in trouble means a story.

ARTHUR: Help! Help!

SUE: Hello. Are you in some sort of trouble?

ARTHUR: Yes, I am.

SUE: Good.

ARTHUR: My wife's having a heart attack.

SUE: Oh! Scoop of the Year!

ARTHUR: I can't get any help.

SUE (*To Sam*): It's our lucky day.

SAM: Hold on, Sue. There might be something in this.

SUE: Sam, this is about as newsworthy as a sandcastle in the Sahara...

SAM: But maybe our friend here is a victim of the strike.

SUE: Ah! I see what you mean. *(To Arthur:)* Have you tried the emergency Services?

ARTHUR: Yes, I have, but they're busy conducting a campaign of some sort.

SUE: Productive resistance?

ARTHUR: That's it, yes.

SUE: So they refused to come?

ARTHUR: Yes. A lady came and took my wife's particulars, but she said Martha would have to go on the waiting list, and I don't think Martha can wait.

SUE: Right! Sam, get some pictures.

ARTHUR: Will you help us?

SUE: We certainly will.

She and Sam go into section one, where Sam does his filming.

Oh Lord, she's not dead, is she? No, phew, she's still breathing.

ARTHUR: I don't know what to do..

SUE: Don't worry, I'll tell you what to do.

ARTHUR: Oh, thank you. We've been married for forty-five years after being childhood sweethearts, and we've never been separated.

SUE: That's very touching. Take some close-ups, Sam.

ARTHUR: What are we going to do?

SUE: We're going to do an interview, that's what we're going to do. You just stand here...

ARTHUR: But what about Martha?

SUE: Martha doesn't seem to be in a fit state for an interview, does she?

ARTHUR: But what are we going to do for Martha?

SUE: We're going to make Martha a star, that's what.

ARTHUR: But she needs attention.

SUE: She'll get all the attention she needs, Arthur. Now you just answer my questions, and leave all the rest to me. Come on,

She stands with Arthur in front of the camera.

I'm standing here in the house of Arthur and Martha, where Martha lies unconscious and scarcely breathing after a severe heart attack. Now then, Arthur, have you called for help?

ARTHUR: Yes. You heard me.

SUE: And have you had any response?

ARTHUR: Yes, you came along with that man and his camera.

SUE: No, I mean before we came along. Did you call the emergency services?

ARTHUR: Yes, I told you I did.

SUE: And they refused to come?

ARTHUR: Yes, I told you, they were campaigning for something...

SUE: In other words, the emergency services have left this unfortunate lady here, possibly to die, while her distraught husband cries in vain for help. Now if she should die, the question will inevitably be asked: who is responsible? Is it the union, the management, or the government? We are going to pursue all three parties to get their version of these scandalous events. Sue, BBC News, London. Great! Damn! *(To Sam:)* Keep going. In the meantime, Martha's life hangs by a thread. Will she live, or will she die? Sue, BBC News, London. *(To Arthur:)* Nearly forgot that bit. Now, let's have a look. Yes, she's still breathing. If you can keep her

alive, we might get a couple of days out of this.

ARTHUR: But I don't know how to keep her alive!

SUE: Exactly! It's not your job, is it? Come on, Sam, we've got work to do.

ARTHUR: Will you get someone to look at her?

SUE: Don't worry, Arthur, there'll be millions of people looking at her. You just hold on.

ARTHUR: Well, all right then.

Sue and Sam go into section two.

I wish you'd wake up, Martha.

He sits beside her, holding her hand.

SUE: Jack!

Jack comes in from upstage, looking exceptionally smart.

JACK: Ready and waiting.

He and Sue stand before the camera.

SUE: With me now is Jack, the leader of the emergency workers' union....

JACK: Executive chairman.

SUE: Executive chairman. Jack, how has the strike gone?

JACK: It's not a strike, Sue, let's get that clear. It's a campaign of productive resistance, and it's gone extremely well. In fact, the response of our members has been fantastic. One hundred per cent solid. We have completely paralysed all the emergency services in this country, which is a clear indication that my members are angry - very angry indeed - at the way they've been treated.

SUE: What do you have to say about the inconvenience caused to the public?

JACK: Well, sod the public. I couldn't care a monkey's...ah, the public. My members have ensured that the public have not suffered at all as a result of this positive action of ours. We have at all times guarded the public's interests.

SUE: Jack, we've just heard of the distressing case of Martha, who's dying of a heart attack and has been unable to obtain assistance.

JACK: That's not true. That is a complete lie. Who's Martha?

SUE: You were called in by her husband...

JACK: Ah! Right! Now that is a special case, of course, and I'm not at liberty to discuss individual cases individually, but I can assure you that wherever the public has called upon my members in a genuine emergency, my members have responded immediately and categorically.

SUE: But we've just come from Martha's house, and...

JACK: Any individual cases of individual hardship are individually and categorically the fault of management and the government.

SUE: If Martha dies, will you feel in any way responsible for her death?

JACK: No.

SUE: Would you like to elaborate on that?

JACK: At this point in time, under the present circumstances, and strictly within the parameters of the situation as it stands, no.

SUE: You're not prepared to respond to Martha's call for help?

JACK: All genuine emergencies are being responded to by my members. With immediacy and with categorical...ness. At this point in time I can't make any further comment, except to say that my executive committee are unanimous that our constructive campaign of productive resistance will continue until our fully justified demands have been met. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an important engagement - which Arsenal need to win.

He goes off upstage.

SUE: Thank you, Jack, executive chairman of the emergency workers' union. Now we're going to get the views of Sir Peter, chairman of the board.

She and Sam have moved over to Section Three.

Sir Peter! Are you there?

PETER: Go away!

SUE: We only want to ask you a few questions. And if you don't come out, we'll say lots of nasty things about you.

He comes on from upstage.

PETER: I've got a migraine.

SUE: Have you sent for the emergency services?

PETER: No, no, I'm privately insured.

SUE: When we last spoke to you, Sir Peter, you said that if the strike went ahead, you'd shoot yourself or, I quote, "shoot the union chappie". Do you plan to implement either of these threats?

PETER: Ah! Well, of course, the situation has changed.

SUE: In what way, Sir Peter?

PETER: Well, they're on strike, aren't they? I mean, totally unforeseeable circumstances... my job to man the bridges...fight them on the beaches...

SUE: What plans do you have to end the strike?

PETER: Absolutely none. You haven't got any suggestions, have you?

SUE: You could cancel staff cuts and pay them what they're asking.

PETER: Well, yes, but then they'd win, wouldn't they?

SUE: Somebody's got to win.

PETER: I've got to win. I'll lose my job otherwise.

SUE: Have you been in touch with the union?

PETER: Certainly not. Last people I want to talk to.

SUE: But the whole nation will be expecting you to try and end the deadlock. How are you going to do that without talking?

PETER: Let me repeat what I have said repeatedly and will repeat once more: I am ready to talk at any time, and any place with the unions.

SUE: Without prior conditions?

PETER: With no prior conditions whatsoever. But they must go back to work straight away, and accept the cuts and the pay-freeze.

SUE: What response have you had from the public over this strike?

PETER: The public are against this strike. And indeed the strikers are against this strike.

SUE: Well, we've heard from the union that the strikers' support has been one hundred per cent solid.

PETER: I know for a fact that vast numbers of workers have turned up for work as usual. I've had sacks of letters from them, begging me not to give way. There are many places where the emergency services are running absolutely normally.

SUE: Ah, can you tell us some?

PETER: What?

SUE: Can you tell us where the services are working normally?

PETER: Certainly. In every single place where workers have turned up to work normally, the service is working normally, and let me say this...

SUE: Can you name some?

PETER: ...it's absolutely clear...

SUE: Can you name some?

PETER: Let me finish what I want to say. Thank you. Flannel rhubarb flannel rhubarb flannel rhubarb...

SUE: May I just ask you one more question, Sir Peter?

PETER: Oh God, must you?

SUE: What are your feelings about the tragic case of Martha?

PETER: Martha?

SUE: The lady who's dying from a heart attack and can't get any attention.

PETER: Well, it's absolutely typical, isn't it? She should get herself privately insured like everybody else.

SUE: The whole nation is following this case, Sir Peter, and if she dies, there'll be a lot of ill feeling directed against you.

PETER: Me? But I haven't done anything.

SUE: Exactly.

PETER: Exactly what?

SUE: She may die because you haven't done anything. That's why the public will be against you.

PETER: That's damned unfair! I don't even know the blessed woman.

SUE: People are going to say that you don't care.

PETER: Oh, well, I am of course deeply distressed by the case of...what was her name?

SUE: Martha.

PETER: Martha. We on the management side care passionately about our public, and the union's conduct in ignoring this tragic case is absolutely scandalous and unforgivable. Do they not care what happens to the public? Have they no feelings?

SUE: What are you going to do about it?

PETER: Do?

SUE: Are you going to try and save Martha?

PETER: I shall do everything I possibly can to save Martha.

SUE: How?

PETER: Erm...

Patricia comes in from upstage.

Er...

PATRICIA: I'm off now, darling.

PETER: Ah, darling!

PATRICIA: Yes, darling?

PETER: Look, darling, I've got the chappies from the media here, and they're asking what I'm going to do about this woman with a heart attack.

PATRICIA: What about it, darling?

PETER: Well, you could go and have a look at her, couldn't you?

PATRICIA: But darling, I'm just taking Daisy for her riding lesson up at Hillhouse, where that frightfully handsome, amazingly virile Jeremy Corfe will be waiting for us.

PETER: But darling, it's the media. I've got to do something. If I don't do something, I might lose my job, and we'll be in the absolute soup.

PATRICIA: Oh very well! If I must, I must. I shall have to ring Jeremy and tell him I'll be late.

PETER: Thank you, darling. *(To Sue and the camera:)* This is a very special case, and I'm taking personal responsibility for it as proof of how deeply, profoundly

and sincerely I feel about it. *(To Patricia:)* I'm sure it won't take more than a minute, darling.

PATRICIA: It certainly won't.

She marches off to Section One, followed by Sue and Sam. Peter does a practice golf swing.

PETER: Fore!

He goes off upstage.

PATRICIA: Now then, what's the trouble?

ARTHUR: Oh doctor, thank you for coming. I knew the emergency services of our wonderful country wouldn't let us down in our hour of need.

PATRICIA: Yes, yes, you bumbling old fool, but what's wrong with you?

ARTHUR: It's my wife, doctor.

PATRICIA: Don't come to me with your marriage problems.

ARTHUR: No, doctor, she's having a heart attack.

PATRICIA: Are you a doctor?

ARTHUR: No, doctor.

PATRICIA: Then how do you know it's a heart attack? Well, let's have a look.

She has a look.

She's asleep. Good. Best thing for her.

ARTHUR: I think she's unconscious, doctor.

PATRICIA: Most people lose consciousness when they sleep, you silly little man. Any other symptoms?

ARTHUR: She had these terrible pains in the chest.

PATRICIA: How terrible is a pain? It doesn't seem very terrible to me. She's not even whimpering.

ARTHUR: That's because she's unconscious.

PATRICIA: Nonsense. It's all in the mind. Everybody has twinges. I even have twinges myself. I've no time for whinges about twinges. When she wakes up, tell her to ignore them.

She takes Martha's wrist. Short pause.

Pulse is a bit low.

ARTHUR: How low is it, doctor?

PATRICIA: Twelve. Nothing to worry about. Plenty of rest, plenty of exercise, cut out the fats, sugars, alcohol, tobacco, carbohydrates, dairy products and anything else you can think of, she'll be as right as rain in no time. If there's no improvement in the next twelve months, don't hesitate to contact me.

ARTHUR: She'll be all right then?

PATRICIA: Nothing wrong with her.

ARTHUR: Oh, thank you, doctor!

Patricia, looking at her watch, marches off downstage.

Oh, what a relief! You're going to be all right, Martha. *(To Sue and Sam:)*

I was so worried! I thought I was going to lose my beloved Martha. I must say, our health service is wonderful, though I was just beginning to lose heart a little bit when nobody responded to my cry for help. But now my faith is fully restored, and I would like to say thank you to you and to everybody who's been so kind to Martha and myself in our hour of need.

SUE *(to Sam:)* Pretty boring stuff.

ARTHUR: Thank you.

SAM: I'm not so sure.

ARTHUR: From the bottom of my heart.

SUE: What do you mean?

SAM: Look at her.
Sue goes to have a look.

ARTHUR: England is a wonderful country, and today - now that my Martha has been pronounced fit and well by the National Health Service - I'm prouder than ever to be British and a citizen of this blessed island.

SUE: You're right. She's dead. Bring the camera over here, Sam.

SAM *(to Arthur:)* You'd better come as well.

ARTHUR: Pardon?

SAM: Your wife. She's snuffed it.
He goes to the body.

SUE: Lucky for us. Let's have some close-ups.

ARTHUR: What's happened?

SUE: She's dead, Arthur.

ARTHUR: Dead? But she can't be! Excuse me.
He has to get past Sam.

Martha! Martha! No! No!

SUE: Now then, Arthur, what exactly are your feelings on learning that your wife is dead?

ARTHUR: Martha!

SUE: Who do you hold responsible for your wife's death?

ARTHUR: I don't know. Please leave me alone.

SUE: Arthur, the whole nation is watching you now, and...

ARTHUR: Please!

SUE: *(to camera:)* Arthur is understandably very upset by his wife's death, which of course need never have happened. Questions will be asked, and we intend to ask them, but first I'm going to try again to get Arthur's own reactions. Arthur, everyone is shocked by Martha's death, and we wondered if you had anything to tell the viewers about it. How shocked are you?

ARTHUR: I can't talk!

SUE: Then one might say you're shocked beyond words. Do you blame Martha's death on the union?

ARTHUR: She's gone!

SUE: Or would you say it's the fault of management?

ARTHUR: I've lost my beloved!

SUE: Or perhaps of the government?
Sam has thrust the camera right into Arthur's face, and now he tries to push it aside.

ARTHUR: Please don't do that.

SAM: I'm only doing my job! I've got a job to do, you know!

ARTHUR: I don't understand it! The doctor said she was all right!

SUE: Ah, you blame the doctor, then?

ARTHUR: Martha! Martha!
He collapses over her.

SUE: Hm, we're not going to get much out of him. Maybe we should go straight for the top.

SAM: The Prime Minister?

SUE: Why not?
They head for Section Four. Dennis enters upstage and comes to meet them. Doris also enters, but watches from upstage.

DENNIS: It's great news, great news. I'm absolutely delighted, and I think most right-thinking people will be delighted, too.

SAM: He's flipped his lid.

SUE: With respect, Prime Minister, I can't see much cause for celebration.

DENNIS: You've got to look on the bright side, Sue. One less is one less. Better than one more, eh? I think we can take this as a sign that government policies are working, and working well.

SUE: You mean it's government policy to kill people off?

DENNIS: Kill people off? What are you talking about?

SUE: Martha has just died, and you're saying government policies are working.

DENNIS: I was talking about our gaining a point in the opinion polls. Oh, I say, what a misunderstanding! Ha ha ha! Somebody's died, eh?

SUE: Martha. The lady whose struggle for life has been watched by the whole nation, while the union was on strike, the employers refused to negotiate, and the government did nothing. Now people are asking who's responsible.

DENNIS: Oh! Well, surely they don't think I was responsible!

SUE: You're the Prime Minister.

DENNIS: Yes, I know. You don't have to tell me that I'm Prime Minister.

SUE: People are saying, Prime Minister, that the government should have stepped in to resolve the dispute before Martha died.

DENNIS: Are you recording this?

SUE: Yes.

DENNIS: First of all, Sue, let me say this: I am deeply shocked and profoundly upset by the news of Martha's passing. She was a personal and very old friend of mine, and I shall miss her more than I can say. At such a time, one's heart goes out to the family and close friends.

SUE: All of whom are saying that you should have done something.

DENNIS: One moment, I'll comment on that in due course, but first let me say this: any man's death diminishes me. The Bible.

SUE: John Donne.

DENNIS: Was it? Well, he got it from the Bible. Any man's death diminishes me, and this death diminishes me a great deal. I am deeply diminished, and so is the whole country, and I want to make it absolutely clear so that there can be no arguments either now or later that this death is a diminishment for all of us.

SUE: What the country wants to know, Prime Minister, is who is responsible for this death.

DENNIS: The Opposition. It's a clear-cut case.

SUE: Do you have any evidence for this?

DENNIS: I don't need evidence. You know as well as I do, Sue, that my government has always stood for freedom and justice, peace and prosperity, and our policies have worked - have worked extremely well — and this latest swing in the opinion polls shows clearly that our message is getting through to the great British people.

SUE: Prime Minister, since we can't get a straight answer out of you concerning Martha's death, could we have your views on the emergency services crisis?

DENNIS: Crisis? What crisis?

SUE: The strike which has paralysed the emergency services.

DENNIS: That's not a crisis, Sue. You media people always try to make a crisis out of a hiccup. That's rather good! A crisis out of a hiccup.

SUE: People are dying as a result of this strike, Prime Minister, and the public are very concerned.

DENNIS: Now let me make one thing absolutely clear right from the start: the government is taking this emergency services hiccup very seriously — very seriously indeed.

SUE: Is there any sign of a breakthrough?

DENNIS: I think I can safely say that things are moving in the right direction.

SUE: Is Martha's death the right direction?

DENNIS: Now don't twist my words. I never said Martha's death was the right direction. I am deeply shocked and profoundly upset by Martha's death.

SUE: Could it have been prevented?

DENNIS: That, of course, is a question that has to be asked, and I'm glad you've asked it.

SUE: What's the answer?

DENNIS: Naturally inquiries will have to be made, and you certainly won't expect me to pre-empt the findings of any inquiry. But I shall stop at nothing to do what I know is right and proper for this, our country. Your country. The country we all love and cherish, and if need be would die for. Thank you all, God bless you all, and I wish you a very merry Christmas.

He withdraws into section four, and Sam lowers his camera.

What did you think of that, Doris? Wasn't I brilliant? I think that's one of the best interviews I've ever given. I didn't answer a single question. It was masterly. I shouldn't be surprised if that interview doesn't become seminal. And all the people out there, you see, will be thinking what a strong leader they have, in firm control of their affairs, Open, honest and efficient. It was brilliant!

DORIS: It's a pity Martha's dead.

DENNIS: What?

DORIS: People aren't going to like it.

DENNIS: Ah, but they're going to think it was the Opposition's fault.

DORIS: Why should they?

DENNIS: Because I said it was.

DORIS: Why should they believe you?

DENNIS: Oh dear, Doris, you've got a lot to learn about politics. People always believe what you tell them, so long as you say it convincingly enough.

DORIS: But I don't believe you.

DENNIS: Ah yes, but you know me.

DORIS: And the Opposition won't believe you.

DENNIS: Well, they won't believe me on principle. That's why they're the Opposition.

DORIS: And the media people certainly don't believe you.

DENNIS: Because they're looking for trouble.

DORIS: Who does believe you, then?

DENNIS: The ordinary people, Doris. Your average voter. You see, I know how ordinary people think — I've mixed with them.

DORIS: You mixed with them the other day, and said you got an earful.

DENNIS: Oh well, that woman was an exception. She was unhinged.

DORIS: What about all the average voters who voted against you in the election? And what about the 54 per cent against you in the last opinion poll?

DENNIS: Ah, we gained a point in the last opinion poll.

DORIS: But do all those people believe you?

DENNIS: Don't they?

DORIS: If they believe you, why are they against you?

DENNIS: I don't know. Frankly, I can't understand it. Surely they don't believe what the other lot tell them. I mean, you can see at a glance that they're lying. Or evading the question. Whenever you ask them what they would do, they just go racing off at a tangent — usually blaming us. I don't know how anyone can trust them.

During this dialogue, Arthur has stood up. He now utters a cry of rage and despair:

ARTHUR: Aaaaaaaaargh!

DENNIS: What was that?

ARTHUR: Aaaaaaaaargh!

DORIS: Someone been listening to your speeches?

Arthur goes into section two, picks up the table and chairs, and smashes them on the ground. He will go on to do the same in sections three and four.

SAM: There's something going on over there.

SUE: Come on.

They go to investigate.

It's Jack's place.

SAM: Maybe he's just heard the latest offer.

SUE: That can't be Jack. He never lifts a finger, let alone a table.

Sam films. Arthur moves into section three.

It's Arthur!

ARTHUR: Aaaaaaaaargh!

Jack and Joy enter section two from upstage.

DORIS: It's coming nearer.

DENNIS: You know what that is, Doris? That's the Leader of the Opposition.

JACK: Bloody hell!

JOY: What's happened?

JACK: Strike breakers! That's what it is! Bloody scabs! Sent by the bloody management!

JOY: Do something, Jack!

Jack looks round wildly, picks up a chair, puts it the right way up, and sits on it.

SUE: He's gone crazy. Where's he heading for now?

Arthur moves into section four.

SAM: This should be fun.

Doris screams.

DENNIS: Good Lord!

He tries to hide behind Doris, but she runs downstage, and he follows her. Arthur smashes the furniture. Peter and Patricia enter section three from upstage.

DORIS: Doris, don't leave me!

DORIS: Who is he?

DENNIS: Damned Opposition! It must be that point I gained in the polls!

PETER: Oh I say!

PATRICIA: All my lovely furniture!

PETER: The place is absolutely ruined! My God, it's those union chappies!

PATRICIA: Darling, do something!

PETER: What can I do, darling?

PATRICIA: Well make them all redundant!

DORIS: Dennis, stop him.

DENNIS (*timidly, keeping his distance:*) Stop! Stop, I say!

Arthur comes towards them.

Help!

Arthur veers towards Sue and Sam, confronts the latter, grasps his camera, and hurls it to the ground.

SUE: Look out, Sam! (*She screams.*)

SAM: Hey! Get off!

DENNIS: Damned Opposition! It must be that point I gained in the polls.

PETER: Oh I say!

PATRICIA: All my lovely furniture!

PETER: The place is absolutely ruined! My God, it's those union chappies!

PATRICIA: Darling, do something!

PETER: What can I do, darling?

PATRICIA: Well make them all redundant.

DORIS: Dennis, stop him.

DENNIS (*timidly, keeping his distance:*) Stop! Stop, I say!

Arthur comes towards them.

Help!

Arthur veers towards Sue and Sam, confronts the latter, grasps his camera, and hurls it to the ground.

SUE: Look out, Sam! (*She screams.*)

SAM: Hey! Get off!

JOY: What's all that row?

JACK: Management intimidation, that's what it is.

PATRICIA: What's that frightful noise?

PETER: Damned union chappies gone berserk.

SAM: What the hell did you do that for, Arthur? You'd have been on telly!

Arthur stands before him, and his face crumples. Slowly he subsides, and finishes bowed down on hands and knees, weeping. Simultaneously Jack and Joy, Peter and Patricia move downstage, so that they and the other two couples now form a semi-circle round Arthur.

JACK (*to Peter:*) What's he crying for? I suppose you didn't pay him enough.

PETER: I don't know what you're insinuating, my good man, but I assume he's one of your thugs.

JACK: No, my thugs are all productively resisting.

JOY: What are you waiting for, Jack? Thump him.

JACK: Stand up, you bastard, **so** I can knock you down.

PATRICIA: Who is he, darling?

PETER: I don't know, darling.. Maybe he's one of those Muslim fundamentalists.

PATRICIA: Why is he blubbing?

PETER: Maybe they're supposed to blub while they pray.

PATRICIA: He's not praying. He's only blubbing.

PETER: Maybe blubbing is their way of praying, darling.

DORIS: He's certainly not the Leader of the Opposition, Dennis.

DENNIS: I'll bet they hired him.

DORIS: I wonder why he's crying.
Sam has been examining his camera.

SAM: It's bust. He's bloody bust my camera!
Arthur now begins to crawl towards section one. His initial movement startles them all into silence, and they watch until he has gone out of the semi-circle.

DENNIS (to Doris:) Don't you think someone should do something? He's getting away!

DORIS: You're the Prime Minister. Why don't you do something?

DENNIS: Oh God, decisions, decisions!

JOY: Aren't you going to stop him?

JACK: What?

JOY: Stop him!

JACK: I can't.

JOY: Why not?

JACK: I'm on strike.

SAM: I'll bloody stop him!
He hurls himself onto Arthur. Joy immediately joins him.

JOY: Come on, Jack!
Jack joins them.

PETER: I say, they've got him.
He and Patricia rush across. Arthur disappears beneath his attackers. Arms rise and fall, and there is much grunting and groaning.

DORIS: They'll kill him.

DENNIS: Serves him right. I'm all in favour of the death penalty for people like that.

DORIS: I thought ours was the party for justice.

DENNIS: Exactly. And he's getting it.
The attackers (who do not include Sue) get off their victim and stand looking at him. For a moment he lies still, but then stirs and makes a few painful attempts to resume his crawl. He reaches out towards section one, then falls. Silence. Periodically he will revive, crawl a few inches, and fall again. On these occasions he is ignored by the others.

SUE: Arthur! Arthur!
She touches him.
I think he's dead.

PATRICIA: Nonsense.
She checks his pulse.

SUE: Is he dead?

PATRICIA: I can't seem to find his pulse. Stupid man! Where's he put it?

JACK: Have a look at his eyes, then.

PATRICIA: Do you mind not telling me what to do, you odious man.

JACK (to Joy:) He's dead all right. I've seen dead people before. Fred Jarrett dropped dead on the day management said yes.
Arthur groans.

PATRICIA: He's alive. Malingerer!

PETER: These union chaps'll do anything to get a doctor's certificate.

SUE: He's in a pretty bad way.

SAM: Do unto others as they do unto your camera.

PATRICIA: It's the only way to deal with these hooligans. If they were all given a good thrashing, there'd be a lot less hooliging.

PETER: Pity we can't do the same to the damn unions.
Dennis and Doris join the rest.

DENNIS: Taught him a lesson, have you?

PETER: Half killed the blighter.

DENNIS: Oh, just half a lesson.

SUE: I think you've all got a problem.

DENNIS: So has he, by the look of him!
He expects a laugh and doesn't get one.

SUE: What's he going to say if he recovers?

PETER: If he's got half a spark of decency in him, he'll say sorry.

SUE: He might say you all assaulted him.

JACK: We never assaulted him.

DENNIS: Just peppered him a little, eh? *(To Doris:)* Assaulted... peppered....

PATRICIA: Are you saying that he'll sue us?

SUE: You might have crippled him.

PETER: But the boulder smashed our furniture.

JACK: Yes, it was self-defence.

SAM: Sue's right, if he recovers we could be in trouble.

JOY: Supposing he doesn't recover?

SAM: Then we could be in even more trouble.

SUE: That's why I said you had a problem.

SAM: Why "you"?

SUE: I never touched him.

DENNIS: I never touched him either. This is one unholy mess you can't blame me for.

PETER: I say, I haven't quite understood what the problem is.

JACK: You never bloody do!

SAM: If he survives, he could have us charged with assault. And if he dies, we could be charged with murder.

PETER: Oh! That wouldn't go down too well at the club.

JOY: If he survives, he'll be a witness, but if he dies, there won't be any witnesses, apart from us, and we're not going to tell.

PATRICIA: Are you suggesting we should let him die?

JOY: Or help him to die.

PATRICIA: That's immoral, and a very good idea.

JACK: What would we do with the body?

JOY: What we do with everything else we don't want.

JACK: Give it to Oxfam.

JOY: No, chuck it in the canal.

DENNIS *(To Doris:)* Isn't this exciting! I do like mixing with ordinary people.

DORIS: He should be taken to hospital.

JACK: Ah, but thanks to this nitwit and that nitwit, there's no-one to take him, is there?

JOY: He looks pretty dead now anyway.

DORIS: If he's dead, then we'll have to inform the authorities.

DENNIS: Ah, but I'm the ultimate authority, Doris. I'm Prime Minister. You can inform me.

DORIS: I don't think, Dennis, that you should be involved in this at all. It's a dirty business.

DENNIS: So is politics, dear. And I have never shrunk from....

DORIS: You'd better shrink from this, Dennis. This is murder, not a cabinet leak.

JACK: Well, we've heard both sides of the argument now, and we'll take a vote on a show of hands. Those in favour...
He raises his own hand, and continues without a pause:
 Those against...
No hands. He continues without a pause:
 Carried unanimously. Who's going to finish him off?

PETER: I didn't quite follow that, old boy.

JACK: We've just voted unanimously that our friend here is not going to survive.

PETER: Have we?

DENNIS: That was brilliant! How did he do it?

JACK: So who's going to finish him off? Normally, I'd do it myself, but as you all know, I and my members are at present engaged in productive resistance, which counts me out.

SAM: We media people are just here to observe. We don't want to be accused of stirring things up.

JACK *(to Peter:)* So it's up to you.

PETER: Pardon?

JACK: Finish him.

PETER: Finish him?
Jack draws his finger across his throat and clicks his tongue.
 But you can't ask me to do that.

JACK: Are you denying the democratic process? This is typical of management! We reach a unanimous agreement, and ten seconds later he's saying he can't do it!

DENNIS: I wonder if he gives private lessons.
A policeman enters downstage left.

JACK: Everybody here is a witness...

POLICEMAN: Evening all.
Stunned silence. The policeman stops beside Arthur and looks down at him.
 Had a few too many, has he?
He pokes Arthur with his toe, and Arthur groans.
 I never cease to wonder at the depths to which human nature is prepared to plummet. There is no other animal on this earth that will, with premeditation and intent, sozzle its own brain that it is incapable of anything else but lying in pools of its own vomit. And this, mark, executed and performed solely in the name of pleasure.
He does a double take.
 Wait a moment, wait a moment. This man is covered in blood. Torn clothes. Cuts. Bruises.
He sniffs.
 Alcohol free breath. I have a strong suspicion that this man has been the victim of foul play. This could be my lucky day. Right! Whodunnit?

He surveys them one by one, until his gaze rests on Dennis.

I've seen you before somewhere. You're an old lag, aren't you?

DENNIS: (*at full height:*) I am the Prime Minister of England.

POLICEMAN: I wouldn't make such jokes round here if I were you, sir.

DENNIS: Why not?

POLICEMAN: The mere mention **of** the Prime Minister may incite people to violence.

DENNIS: I am the Prime Minister.

PETER: He is actually, officer.

JACK: It's true, mate. Only the Prime Minister would be fool enough to admit he's Prime Minister.

The policeman goes to have a closer look at Dennis.

POLICEMAN: You certainly look like him, sir. Where do you live?

DENNIS: Number Ten Downing Street.

POLICEMAN: That is correct. Well, this is a rare pleasure, sir.

DENNIS: I should think so.

POLICEMAN: And it gives me the opportunity to tell you that I regard you as the worst Prime Minister this country's ever had.

DENNIS: Now look here...

POLICEMAN: And I'm delighted to be arresting you for the mugging of yet another innocent victim.

DENNIS: I never touched him!

POLICEMAN: With your record, sir, I find that hard to believe.

DORIS: Nevertheless it's true, officer. My husband and I had no part in this.

POLICEMAN: Well, if it wasn't you, who was it? Now listen, all of you. This is my big chance. If I can solve this crime, it may earn me the promotion that has been unjustly denied me for the last twenty years. I am desperate to become the Sherlock Holmes or Hercules Poirot of my day, and would therefore be most grateful if the culprit would kindly own up.

Silence.

Then sod you all.

Arthur groans.

Aha! I think I know how to identify the culprit.

He goes to Arthur and kneels beside him.

Whodunnit?

Arthur whispers inaudibly.

Speak up, you old fool. Who attacked you?

ARTHUR: I was attacked by...aaaaaaaah!

He falls and does not stir again till indicated.

POLICEMAN: Blast! He's dead! He might have waited!

He stands up.

Oh come on, you lot, give us a clue.

Silence.

Very well. As my dentist used to say, let's take the wobbly one first.

He returns to Dennis.

Tell me all you know about this murder.

DENNIS: What murder?

POLICEMAN: There's a dead body over there, and I intend to find out who killed him.

DENNIS: You can't kill a dead body, officer. A dead body is already dead.

POLICEMAN: Who killed that man?

DENNIS: Officer, let me make one thing absolutely clear: I believe passionately in law and order. My party has always given total support to the police at all times, and only three years ago I personally gave a pound to help train guide dogs for the blind, and so you can rely both on me and on my government to give you every assistance in the ceaseless war against crime—a war which must be won if the streets of Britain are to be safe for the people of Britain.

POLICEMAN: Thank you, sir. Who killed him?

DENNIS: They did.
The policeman confronts Peter.

POLICEMAN: Right, sir. You heard The Prime Minister.

PETER: But officer, you know you can't believe a word the Prime Minister says.

POLICEMAN: Nevertheless, sir, I would like your statement, and I must warn you that anything you say may be taken down, twisted, forged, rewritten and used in evidence against you.

PETER: I see. Damn. Well, it was suicide.

POLICEMAN: Suicide, sir?

PETER: Suicide.

POLICEMAN: Are you saying it was suicide, sir?

DENNIS: Yes.

POLICEMAN: Suicide. He beat himself to death, did he?

PETER: Well, no, not exactly. *(To Patricia:)* Did you see what happened, darling?

PATRICIA: He stepped out in front of a passing vehicle.

PETER: Oh yes, so he did!

POLICEMAN: A passing vehicle?

PETER: An ambulance. He stepped out in front of an ambulance.

POLICEMAN: An ambulance. And where would that ambulance be now, sir?

PETER *(pointing at Jack:)* You'd better ask him. One of his members would have been driving it.

JACK: Bloody hell!
The policeman goes to Jack.

POLICEMAN: I understand, sir, that the deceased stepped out in front of an ambulance driven by one of your members.

JACK: At this present moment in time, officer, due to the intransigent attitude of management towards staffing levels and our justified wage claim, my members are engaged in an active campaign of productive resistance. Consequently, any ambulance on the road at this present moment in time can only have been driven by a member of management.
(Pointing at Peter:) So you'd better ask him.
The policeman returns to Peter.

POLICEMAN: I understand, sir, that the...

PETER: Good Lord! Now there's a fantastic coincidence!

POLICEMAN: What is, sir?

PETER: The ambulance driver. *(Pointing at Sam:)* It's that chappie over there.

POLICEMAN: Ah, now we're getting somewhere.
He goes to Sam.

I understand, sir, that you were driving the ambulance that ran over the deceased.

SAM: I'm a cameraman!

POLICEMAN: You don't look like a camera, "man". And I would like to know where you've put the ambulance.
 SAM: Look, I haven't even got a driving licence!
 POLICEMAN: It's a serious offence, sir, to drive without a driving licence.
 SAM: I wasn't driving!
 POLICEMAN: Are you telling me, sir, that the ambulance drove itself?
 SAM: There wasn't any ambulance!
 POLICEMAN: Are you telling me, sir, that there wasn't any ambulance?
 SAM: That's precisely what I'm telling you.
 POLICEMAN: Are you telling me, sir, that that is precisely what you are telling me?
 SAM: Yes.
 POLICEMAN: Did you say yes?
 SAM: Yes.
 POLICEMAN: Then somebody here is lying. And if there wasn't any ambulance, it must be...

He points at various suspects, and alights on Dennis.

...you.

DENNIS: But I never said there was an ambulance.
 POLICEMAN: Do you deny saying there was an ambulance, sir?
 DENNIS: I do.
 POLICEMAN: And did you say there was not an ambulance, sir?
 DENNIS: I did not.
 POLICEMAN: So you deny saying there was an ambulance, sir, and you deny saying there was not an ambulance. You can't have it both ways.
 DENNIS (*indicating Peter:*) He was the one who said there was an ambulance. (*Indicating Sam:*) And he was the one who said there was not an ambulance.
 POLICEMAN: These are very serious accusations, sir.
 DENNIS: It's true, officer.
 POLICEMAN: Of course it's true, sir. If I say these are serious accusations, then they are serious accusations.

DENNIS (*to Doris:*) The man's an idiot.

POLICEMAN (*to Doris:*) What did he say?

DORIS: He said you ought to be in politics, officer.

POLICEMAN: Thank you, sir. I wish I could say the same for you.

He goes across to Peter.

I understand, sir, that you said there was an ambulance.

PETER: I may have been mistaken.

POLICEMAN: And you did say that gentleman was driving it.

PETER: That may have been a mistake, too.

POLICEMAN: Well, anyone can make a mistake.

Rufus, a black man, has entered left.

RUFUS: Can anyone tell me de way to de Post Office?

Everyone turns to look at him.

What did I say? Did I say anytin' wrong? I'm lookin' for de Post Office.

Is dat a crime?

The policeman comes across and stands in front of Rufus.

POLICEMAN: I'll decide what is and what isn't a crime.

RUFUS: Yes, sir. Could you tell me de way to de Post Office?

POLICEMAN: I could, Sonny, I could. But first, let's establish a few facts, shall we?
You are not from these parts.

RUFUS: No, sir, I'm from de udder side o' town.

POLICEMAN: You know how I know?

RUFUS: Yes, sir. It's cos I don't know de way to de Post Office.

POLICEMAN: It's because of your dark skin.

RUFUS: Dere's plenty people wid dark skin on dis side o' town too, includin' my sister who work at de Post Office.

POLICEMAN: You've been here before.

RUFUS: Yes, sir, but I never seem to be able to find de Post Office.

POLICEMAN: You were here a few minutes ago, when a vicious assault took place on a defenceless pensioner who now lies dead on the pavement.

RUFUS: No, sir.

POLICEMAN: Are you denying that he now lies dead on the pavement?

RUFUS: No, sir, I'm denyin' dat I was dere.

POLICEMAN: Where were you?

RUFUS: I was on de bus, comin' here to visit my sister at de Post Office.

POLICEMAN: I don't believe your story. Do you know why I don't believe your story?

RUFUS: No, sir.

POLICEMAN: Nor do I, Sonny, nor do I, except that I have a certain instinct for these matters — an intuition. It has nothing to do, of course, with the fact that you are a black man. I have no prejudice against you black bastards. In fact, I treat all you black bastards equally. Some of my best friends also treat you black bastards equally. I am now going to conduct a search, Sonny, and do you know what I'll be searching for?

RUFUS: De Post Office?

POLICEMAN: I'll be searching for the murder weapon. Put your hands above your head.
Up!

Rufus raises his arms. The policeman searches.

Aha! Just as I thought.
He pulls out a pencil.

What's this?

RUFUS: Dat's a pencil, sir.

POLICEMAN: Feel the point.
He offers it to Dennis, who feels the point.

DENNIS: Ts ts.

POLICEMAN: That, my friend, is a sharp instrument. That is an offensive weapon.

RUFUS: No, sir, dat's a pencil.

POLICEMAN: This is a weapon that can kill.
He jabs Rufus with the pencil, which breaks.

RUFUS: Now you broke it.
The policeman looks at the pencil.

POLICEMAN: It is my belief that you killed the deceased with this blunt instrument.

RUFUS: No, sir!

POLICEMAN: And I expect you'd all like to know what remarkable processes of Sherlockian deduction have led me to this conclusion.
Some murmurs of encouragement.

When I began this inquiry, there was a suggestion that the deceased had stepped in front of an ambulance driven by an unlicensed driver. This,

however, by the witness's own admission, was a mistake. But in any case I had already deduced from the absence of the ambulance that the ambulance was not there. The one remaining question was: who did attack the deceased? And the answer that I came up with was: this black bastard. The discovery of the murder weapon confirmed my suspicions. What's your name, Sonny?

RUFUS: Rufus, sir, but...

POLICEMAN: Rufus, I'm arresting you for the murder of the deceased. Do you confess your crime?

RUFUS: No, sir.

POLICEMAN (*to others:*) May I ask you all to look the other way please?

They all do, except Doris and Sue. The policeman hits Rufus.

RUFUS: Ow!

POLICEMAN: Do you now confess your crime?

RUFUS: No, sir.

There now follows a brutal assault.

DORIS: Dennis, stop him.

DENNIS (*still looking the other way:*) The government can't interfere with the law, Doris. And besides, I haven't seen a thing.

SUE: Sam, we ought to stop this.

SAM: We're only supposed to be observers, Sue. And besides this might get me off the hook.

POLICEMAN: Do you confess?

RUFUS: No!

POLICEMAN: Ow! Now I've gone and scraped my knuckle. Resisting arrest, and assaulting a policeman. You're for it, my lad.

As he continues the assault, Arthur crawls painfully towards him.

ARTHUR: Stop it! Stop it, I say!

Everyone looks at him, including the policeman, who stops his assault. Leave that poor innocent man alone. He's done nothing wrong.

POLICEMAN: Are you the deceased?

ARTHUR: I was attacked.

POLICEMAN: I wish you'd make up your mind, sir, whether you're dead or not. You only count as the deceased if you're dead, and if you're not dead, then this murder case is not a murder case. Now, are you dead or aren't you dead?

ARTHUR: I wish I was.

POLICEMAN: Ah, that could explain the suicide attempt. Now then, sir, do you recognize this man?

He points to Rufus, who lies unconscious.

ARTHUR: No.

POLICEMAN: This is the man who attacked you.

ARTHUR: No it's not.

POLICEMAN: Yes it is.

ARTHUR: I've never seen him before in my life.

POLICEMAN: Listen, they all look alike. But this is the one we caught, so say yes, and the case is closed.

ARTHUR: He's innocent.

POLICEMAN: He's guilty.

ARTHUR: These are the people who attacked me.

Shocked reactions and denials from all round.

- POLICEMAN: Are you saying these are the people who attacked you?
 ARTHUR: They are.
 POLICEMAN: Do you mean that this guilty coloured man did not attack you, whereas these innocent white people did?
 ARTHUR: They're the ones.
 POLICEMAN: This goes against all experience, all reason, and my theory.
 RUFUS: Help!
 POLICEMAN: Quiet!
 RUFUS: Fetch de doctor! I'm dyin'.
 POLICEMAN: I refuse to believe it.
 RUFUS: It's true!
 POLICEMAN: This is the guilty party.
 ARTHUR: He's innocent.
 POLICEMAN: Then how do you explain the presence of the murder weapon in his possession?
 ARTHUR: What weapon?
 POLICEMAN: This vicious blunt pencil.
 ARTHUR: They attacked me with their fists. He started it,
Arthur points at Sam.
 SAM: Well he broke my camera.
 POLICEMAN: Are you saying he broke your camera, sir?
 SAM: He did.
 POLICEMAN: I'm beginning to get the picture.
 SAM: But they all attacked him, too, officer.
 JACK: We only attacked him because he smashed our table.
 JOY: And chairs.
 POLICEMAN: Now we're getting to the seat of the trouble.
 PATRICIA: He smashed our chairs, too.
 PETER: And our table.
 POLICEMAN: Thereby furnishing me with new evidence.
 DENNIS: He smashed our furniture, too, officer, but I didn't attack him. I merely stood by and watched.
 POLICEMAN: This is a very complicated case.
 RUFUS: Help!
 POLICEMAN: Quiet!
 ARTHUR: Officer, this gentleman is in urgent need of medical attention, as indeed am I, with my injuries both physical and spiritual.
 POLICEMAN: Nobody will leave this pavement till I have completed my inquiries. Right! I have now completed my inquiries and you're all under arrest.
Shocked reactions.
 DENNIS: If this doesn't get me promotion, then nothing will.
 POLICEMAN: You can't arrest me, officer. I'm the Prime Minister.
 SUE: That's as good a reason as any for arresting you.
 SUE: Why are you arresting me, officer?
 POLICEMAN: Wait a minute. Is your name Sue?
 SUE: It is.
 POLICEMAN: My favourite leggy, busty, let-me-get-my-hands-on-her TV presenter?
 SUE: That's right.

POLICEMAN: You're free to go on condition you give me your telephone number. The rest of you will be charged with assault, being accessories to assault, smashing cameras and furniture, and in your case, Sonny Boy, with possessing a deadly weapon, resisting arrest, assaulting a policeman, being a black bastard, and not knowing the way to the Post Office. And that, I think, just about wraps up the case.

DORIS: Not quite, officer.

POLICEMAN: And who might you be, madam?

DORIS: I'm the wife of the Prime Minister.

POLICEMAN: May I offer my condolences.

DORIS: I'm also the witness who saw your violent and unprovoked assault on the gentleman who's lying at your feet. And if you don't let us all go, I shall testify to that effect in court.

SUE: And so shall I.

POLICEMAN: I told you to look the other way.

SUE: But I didn't.

DORIS: Nor did I.

DENNIS: Well done, Doris.

SAM: Well done, Sue.

JOY: I saw him attack that poor innocent black man.

JACK: Yeah, me, too.

Similar noises from Peter and Patricia.

DENNIS: I witnessed that assault, too, officer. You might be able to get the better of these ordinary people, but with me, you're chewing off more than you can bite.

POLICEMAN: Are you all saying that you will accuse me of assault?

DENNIS: That is precisely what we are saying. Isn't it, Doris?

DORIS: It is.

JACK: You'd better let us go, mate.

POLICEMAN: Are you suggesting I let you go?

JACK: That's right.

PATRICIA: And the sooner the better. I'm late for darling Daisy's riding lesson as it is.

POLICEMAN: Are you saying that if I let you go, you will not accuse me of assault?

Affirmative reactions all round.

This is a deliberate attempt to pervert the course of justice. I accept.

ARTHUR: No! I will not sit idly by while the institutions of this once great country are undermined by corruption. My beloved Martha has been sacrificed on the altar of your greed and indifference, and now I intend to take a stand against the inrushing tide of moral degradation that threatens to engulf our society. I will not be browbeaten into accepting a lowering of the standards that once made me proud to be British. This gentleman, like myself, has been the victim of a brutal assault, and those who perpetrated these outrages will be punished. Officer, you must arrest all these people, and when you have done so, you must arrest yourself.

The policeman ushers everyone off. He is left alone with Arthur and Rufus, both of whom are still on the ground.

Have you arrested them?

POLICEMAN: No, sir.

ARTHUR: Then do your duty, officer, as befits a uniformed upholder of the law.

POLICEMAN: Yes, sir.

He hits Arthur on the head with his truncheon. Arthur lies still.

RUFUS: I seen dat. I seen what you done!

POLICEMAN: Are you saying that you saw what I did?

RUFUS: I seen what you done!

POLICEMAN: If you can't speak our language, Sonny, then you should not be here.

He hits Rufus on the head with his truncheon. Rufus lies still. Lights out.

The End

